Eric Diamond Opening Remarks

On behalf of the town of Change Islands, I would like to welcome you to our island community. It is one of the first communities in Newfoundland to be incorporated. Change Island’s history is strongly associated with the fishery, in particular, the cod fishery. Schooners and sailing ships from the east and northeast coast used Change Islands as a stopping point en route to Labrador. Now the cod fishery is going and this year the crab is scarce. Most species are disappearing because of over fishing. We now wonder about our future. We, as a Council, have tried to diversify but it is difficult. Our skills are not often suited to industrial or commercial development. We are fisher persons who have always lived by the sea. This island is precious to us. We want to save our community and continue to live here. The peace and quietness and beauty of this place are worth saving. We welcome you as an international community. We also have ideas and while you are here, talk to the people that live here. They care about this community. Together we can come up with ideas and options that help us continue. The fabric of our Newfoundland society, we feel, is lost without communities like Change Islands.

We often hear people say the best thing they enjoy about Change Islands is the peace and quietness. But for us who have been here since we were born, this is not a peaceful silence, when we remember pre-moratorium years; the sweet music from the motors and the beautiful scenery of boats going to and from the fishing grounds, before the break of dawn and well into the night. The quietness now is not peaceful, but heartbreaking.

As a town, we do have problems. Just a few people are still securing a livelihood from the fishery. Outside the fishery, there are very few jobs. Where do we turn? Some say tourism is the way of the future but it is hard to find the right key to unlock the safe. I admit there have been a few dollars come our way; a few years ago, we cut the brush and made trails. Now we can’t come up with enough dollars for the safe upkeep of these trails. How much do we need? $6 or 7 thousand dollars to hire one person 12-14 weeks a year. We have beautiful picnic sites. What do we need to reach these sites? First, Seal Cove, we need approx. 1.5 km of dirt road, and second, Woody Island Tickle, approx. 1km of dirt road.

We have a gentleman in town who is trying to develop a campsite, a small museum and boat tours to the Squid Jigging Ground and can’t acquire even $1 to help with the start up. Where is all the money that’s talked about for starting new business? Where are we right now as a town, along with a lot of other small towns in Newfoundland and Labrador? We are not lying down yet but we are standing by our deathbed.

If I were to describe things as they are at the present time, I would say

“Change Islands along with the rest of rural Newfoundland and Labrador is dying an agonizing death, with once in awhile, a light dose of morphine from the government to help kill the pain”

It’s hard to say, but if things don’t turn around, the flag will be flying half staff on the ferry dock, signifying that another town in rural Newfoundland and Labrador has passed agonizingly away.

Hopefully, this weekend will be the means of turning around and, we will not just be surviving here. We will be able to live and die here with a little bit of dignity.

I would like to thank the organisers of the workshop for believing it is possible to have a group such as you, here with us. Perhaps you will understand a little more the issues and problems we face by being here for a few days. Welcome and enjoy your stay among us. Thanks you for coming.

Delivered by Eric Diamond, Mayor of Change Islands to an International workshop on “Vulnerability in Coastal Communities: Adaptation to Change and Planning for the Future” sponsored by the Centre for Coastal Studies, Simon Fraser University –Linking Science and Local Knowledge Node of the Oceans Management Research Network
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